

IPEDS Survey Methodology: Web Content

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Introduction

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) administers the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), which is a large-scale survey that collects institution-level data from postsecondary institutions in the United States (50 states and the District of Columbia) and other U.S. jurisdictions. IPEDS defines a postsecondary institution as an organization that is open to the public and has the provision of postsecondary education or training beyond the high school level as one of its primary missions. This definition includes institutions that offer academic, vocational and continuing professional education programs and excludes institutions that offer only avocational (leisure) and adult basic education programs. Definitions for other terms used in this report may be found in the IPEDS online [glossary](#).

NCES annually releases national-level statistics on postsecondary institutions based on the IPEDS data. National statistics include tuition and fees, number and types of degrees and certificates conferred, number of students applying and enrolled, number of employees, financial statistics, graduation rates, student outcomes, student financial aid, and academic libraries.

Currently, there are 12 survey components that comprise the annual IPEDS data collection cycle. The 12 survey components are separated into one of three seasonal reporting periods—fall, winter, or spring. The fall data collection period consists of the Institutional Characteristics (IC), Completions (C), and 12-Month Enrollment (E12) survey components. The winter data collection consists of the Admissions (ADM), Graduation Rates (GR), 200 Percent Graduation Rates (GR200), Outcome Measures (OM), and Student Financial Aid (SFA) survey components. Finally, the spring collection consists of the Academic Libraries (AL), Fall Enrollment (EF), Finance (F), and Human Resources (HR) survey components. During the current IPEDS collection, some data are collected from the prior year to allow institutions to report the most current and complete data.

The IPEDS survey is a web-based collection, called the IPEDS Data Collection System (DCS). When respondents enter data, the DCS automatically calculates totals, averages, and percentages as well as compares the responses with the prior year's data submission for the same institution to ensure the data are consistent. Adding another level of data quality control, the DCS also compares data reported across and within survey components. If data are still missing following the quality assurance procedures, or if an institution (unit) does not respond to a survey component, NCES would conduct imputations and as a result, a complete database is available for analysis.

As required by the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965, as amended (20 USC 1094(a)(17)), the submission of data to IPEDS is mandatory for any institution that participates in or is an applicant for participation in any federal financial assistance program authorized by Title IV of HEA. A mandatory participation consequently results in nearly 100% response rate for each IPEDS survey component. The IPEDS database is used as the principal sampling frame for other NCES postsecondary surveys. In addition to the mandatory participants, the IPEDS database also includes institutions that do not participate in Title IV financial aid programs. These institutions may participate in the IPEDS data collection program, and if they voluntarily respond to the surveys, the institutions are included in the Department of Education's college search tool called The [College Navigator](#). The College Navigator, which is maintained by NCES, is designed to help college students, prospective students, and their parents learn about admission requirements, programs of study, degrees offered, costs, graduation rates, and other characteristics of institutions that they may find helpful in selecting among postsecondary institutions.